***worship@home resources for 2 August***

Call to Worship

The hungry search for bread and the thirsty look for water.  
**This is a time for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.**

Those who ache for meaning and yearn for a deeper life seek for it.  
**This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.**

So let us approach God today with our hunger and our thirst,  
our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings,  
**and may the God of life satisfy our souls.**

HYMN TiS 188 Where wide sky rolls down

Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand,  
where sun turns to gold the grass of the land,  
let spinifex, mulga and waterhole tell  
their joy in the One who made everything well.

Where rain-forest calm meets reef, tide and storm,  
where green things grow lush and oceans are warm,  
let every sea-creature and tropical bird  
exult in the light of the life-giving Word.



Where red gum and creek cross hillside and plain,  
where cool tree-ferns rise to welcome the rain,  
let bushland, farm, mountain-top, all of their days  
delight in the Spirit who formed them for praise.

Now, people of faith, come gather around  
with songs to be shared, for blessings abound!  
Australians, whatever your culture or race,   
come, lift up your hearts to the Giver of grace.

Words © Elizabeth J. Smith 1956-.

For YouTube version with lovely images see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFX7VBH_2ZQ>

prayer

Gracious God,  
We gather to praise you for your character of love and faithfulness  
and for your compassion and generosity towards us.  
**As we hear the story of Jesus feeding thousands of people   
we remember how you continue to feed and nourish us in our need  
through your abiding presence with us.**Where our hearts are sad or anxious today  
bring the hope and peace of your Spirit.  
**Be with us as we listen to the Scriptures being read  
and open our eyes to see where we fit into your story.**

Loving God,   
We confess that we have not always followed your ways.  
**We have turned away our eyes from the poor, hungry and sick.**We have left our brothers and sisters from the first people of this country without justice  
and have locked up asylum seekers declaring them ‘illegal’.   
**Forgive us for our lack of love and compassion.**Forgive us for not seeing our neighbours as ourselves.   
**Forgive us for not seeing you in the faces of those all around in need.**

**We pray in the name of Christ, Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.  
The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.  
And so I declare to you: ‘Our sins are forgiven’  
**Thanks be to God!**

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 55:1-3 (NIV)

“Come, all you who are thirsty,  
    come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without cost.  
Why spend money on what is not bread,  
    and your labor on what does not satisfy?  
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
    and you will delight in the richest of fare.  
Give ear and come to me;  
    listen, that you may live.  
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
    my faithful love promised to David.”

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-19

The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
**slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**The Lord is good to all,  
**and his compassion is over all that he has made.**The Lord upholds all who are falling,  
**and raises up all who are bowed down.**The eyes of all look to you,  
**and you give them their food in due season.**You open your hand,  
**satisfying the desire of every living thing.**The Lord is just in all his ways,  
**and kind in all his doings.**The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
**to all who call on him in truth.**He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;  
**he also hears their cry, and saves them.**

Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’

Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ They replied, ‘We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

REFLECTION

During these days of lockdown we have lots of time to ourselves to ponder about life and to pray. I fear that there will be plenty of funerals in the days and weeks ahead – and for loved ones that will be very difficult. Jesus also knew about grief and suffering. In today’s reading he is mourning the brutal death of his cousin John the Baptist and wanting to get away by himself for some time of rest and reflection.

But the crowds pursue Jesus, who has gained enormous popularity as a healer. He has compassion on the sick who come to him, but eventually it’s time for the people to go home. The setting is significant – in the wilderness – where God has previously fed and cared for the people during the Exodus providing them with manna, the incident from which we probably get the line in the Lord’s Prayer ‘give us today our daily bread’ (Matt 6:11).

On this occasion, Jesus chooses to use and also challenge the faith of the disciples – you give them something to eat! Who? Us? But we’ve got almost nothing – just five small rolls and two fish. It turns out that this seemingly meagre offering is enough. Jesus prays and blesses what the disciples bring and everyone eats and is filled … with 12 baskets of leftovers! (Note that the story never attempts to explain what happened to make this possible).

But is there more to this story than simply filling hungry stomachs? Jesus does more than provide an outdoor picnic. He demonstrates what the kingdom of God is like and points to the character of God who generously provides what we need. In the words of the Isaiah passage, we sometimes need more than bread – and God provides a feast – even milk and wine – all without cost. In the Psalm, God fulfils the desires of those who fear him. For disciples it is a lesson in using what we have in our hands and trusting God to do the rest.

I wonder what we most *need* this day? What are we most *hungry* for? Perhaps we long for freedom from lockdown and the resumption of a more normal life? A vaccine for Covid-19? The pandemic has also highlighted the underlying inequalities and lack of access to secure jobs, healthcare and adequate housing for all – not just in Melbourne but across the world. So perhaps what we most need is a renewed commitment to justice and the transformation of society rather than simply a return to the old status quo?

God abundantly provides what will ultimately satisfy our deepest needs … and sometimes asks us to be part of the answer to our prayers … to use what little we have available to help and transform the lives of others … and to carry God’s blessing to them.

HYMN TiS 547 Be thou my vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art  
thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight,  
be thou my dignity, thou my delight;  
thou my soul’s shelter and thou my high tower;  
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I scorn and the world’s empty praise,  
thou my inheritance, now and always;  
thou and thou only the first in my heart;  
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won,  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Gaelic 8th century. *tr* Mary E. Byrne 1880-1931. Versified Eleanor H. Hull 1860-1935 *alt*.

One of many Youtube versions here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Optrm7lF16s>

OFFERING

On our own, what we have to give doesn't amount to much  
in the light of all you have given to us  
and in the face of so much need in the world.

Put together as a congregation,  
what we offer you here in love becomes more,  
not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness.

We ask you to bless our gifts  
and with the addition of your blessing,  
just as it was with the loaves and fishes,  
may there be enough for all. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, our Creator and Sustainer,  
you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.

Just as you once fed the hungry crowds with five loaves and two small fish,  
we ask that you would again fill those who are empty this day.  
**Pour out your Spirit on all who hunger and thirst.**

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty.  
We think especially of the people fleeing persecution and violence  
who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation  
and watching helplessly as loved ones die.  
**Pour out your Spirit, so that they may be filled.**

We pray for those who are empty emotionally—  
who are lonely during this pandemic and who long for companionship,  
those who are caught in the grip of depression or other mental struggles.  
**Pour out your Spirit, so that they may be comforted.**

We pray for those who are spiritually empty—  
who are troubled but don’t know where to turn;  
who long for purpose and meaning, but who don’t yet know you.  
**Pour out your Spirit, so that they may be satisfied.**

We also pray for those who are sick or contending with illness –  
who are grieving loss of abilities or freedoms,  
or who are waiting anxiously for test results –   
and we name them before you in the silence now …  
**Pour out your Spirit, that they may know your peace.**

Finally we pray using the words Jesus taught us, saying ‘**Our Father in heaven** … ‘

BENEDICTION

May the blessing of God uphold you  
the compassion of Jesus Christ enfold you   
and the empowering of the Holy Spirit sustain you  
this day and always.  
**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.**

SENDING SONG For you, deep stillness

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland   
For you, deep blue of the desert skies  
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones   
For you, sweet water from hidden springs

From the edges seek the heartlands  
and when you're burnt by the journey  
may the cool winds of the hovering  
Spirit soothe and replenish you.

In the name of Christ   
In the name of Christ

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For YouTube version from Balhannah UC in South Australia see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpRWWnZa6Ro>